Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS)

Section A Newsletter

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This Issue

Health benefits of pet ownership

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Rearing a pet has long been a part of human society, but the value of this relationship extends far beyond companionship. Numerous studies across psychology, health sciences, and sociology show that pets contribute significantly to human well-being. From emotional comfort to social enrichment and improved physical health, the advantages of having a pet are both profound and wide-ranging.

Mental and Emotional Well-Being

One of the most notable benefits of owning a pet is the impact on mental health. Animals such as dogs, cats, birds, and even small mammals can help reduce stress and anxiety. Interacting with a pet—whether through stroking, playing, or simply being near them—helps lower cortisol, the body's stress hormone, while increasing oxytocin, a hormone associated with bonding and relaxation. This physiological response promotes calmness, emotional balance, and overall mental stability.

Pets are also powerful companions in combating loneliness. For individuals who live alone or spend long periods without human interaction, the presence of a pet provides emotional connection and a sense of belonging. Their unconditional affection can uplift mood, reduce feelings of isolation, and provide comfort during challenging phases of life.

Moreover, caring for a pet naturally creates structure in a person's lifestyle. Feeding times, walks, grooming, and play establish a consistent routine, which can help individuals struggling with low motivation, depression, or a lack of daily discipline. This sense of responsibility has been shown to improve self-esteem and emotional resilience.

Health Advantages

The physical health benefits of pet ownership are equally impressive. Pets—especially dogs—encourage their owners to engage in regular physical activity through outdoor walks and active play. This increased movement contributes to better cardiovascular health, weight management, and improved stamina.

Research also indicates that pet owners often experience lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels compared to non-owners. The calming effects of animal companionship combined with increased physical activity support a healthier heart and improve overall longevity.

In children, early exposure to pets can strengthen immune systems and reduce the risk of developing allergies and asthma. The presence of animals introduces a variety of harmless microbes that help the body build stronger immunity—a benefit that can last into adulthood.

Social and Developmental Benefits

Beyond mental and physical health, pets also play a role in enhancing social well-being. For many, pets become bridges to human interaction. Walking a dog or visiting a veterinary clinic often leads to meeting new people, sparking conversations, and building community connections. This is particularly valuable for individuals who may otherwise have limited social engagement.

Children also benefit significantly from growing up with pets. Taking care of an animal fosters empathy, patience, and responsibility. These experiences contribute to emotional development and help children understand compassion and respect for other living beings. Additionally, interacting with pets can improve communication skills, cognitive development, and emotional expression.

A Sense of Purpose and Meaning

Perhaps one of the most profound impacts of rearing a pet is the sense of purpose it provides. For many individuals, especially those navigating stressful or transitional periods, pets offer stability, meaning, and emotional grounding. The bond between humans and animals creates a mutually rewarding relationship that enhances quality of life on both sides.

Conclusion

Rearing a pet is more than a lifestyle choice—it is an investment in well-being. The mental, emotional, physical, and social benefits gained through caring for an animal make pet ownership one of the most enriching relationships humans can experience. Whether providing comfort, encouraging routine, improving health, or fostering social connection, pets play a transformative role in the lives of their owners. As modern life becomes increasingly demanding, the companionship of animals continues to stand out as a natural and powerful source of healing and happiness.

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Ethics: The Heart of Medicine: Lessons from History and Responsibility

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Medicine is often celebrated for its scientific breakthroughs—vaccines that eradicate disease, technologies that extend life, and research that reshapes our understanding of the human body. Yet behind every scientific advance lies a deeper question: Should we do this, and if so, how? The answer to that question is found not in laboratories or algorithms, but in ethics. Ethics lies at the very heart of medicine, quietly guiding decisions that affect individual lives and entire populations. It reminds us that medicine is not merely a technical discipline, but a moral enterprise rooted in trust, compassion, and responsibility.

What do we mean by medical ethics?

Medical ethics refers to the moral principles that govern clinical practice and healthcare research. It provides a framework for navigating difficult decisions—whether related to informed consent, confidentiality, allocation of limited resources, or research involving human participants. As medicine becomes more technologically advanced and increasingly commercialised, ethical challenges grow in both number and complexity, making ethical reflection more relevant than ever (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).

Four widely accepted principles form the foundation of modern medical ethics. Respect for autonomy recognises the right of individuals to make informed decisions about their own health. Beneficence obliges healthcare professionals to act in the best interests of patients, while non-maleficence reinforces the duty to avoid harm. Justice demands fairness in access to care and in the distribution of benefits and burdens across society (Gillon, 1994; Veatch, 2016).

Ancient roots, enduring relevance

The ethical practice of medicine is not a modern invention. Its roots can be traced back to Hippocrates in the 5th century BC. The Hippocratic Oath, despite its age, articulated enduring values such as beneficence, non-maleficence, and confidentiality. Hippocrates also promoted careful observation, rational thinking, and moral accountability—principles that continue to underpin ethical medical practice today (Gert, Culver & Clouser, 2006).

When science advances without ethics

History offers powerful reminders of the consequences of neglecting ethics in medicine and research. Some of the most significant scientific advances of the past emerged alongside profound ethical violations, often at the expense of vulnerable populations.

The Tuskegee Syphilis Study remains one of the most striking examples. Conducted over four decades, African American men were deceived and denied effective treatment for syphilis, even after penicillin became available. The study caused immense suffering and fundamentally damaged trust in medical institutions (Jones, 1993). Similarly, the Nazi medical experiments of World War II subjected prisoners to extreme cruelty, prompting global outrage and a collective reckoning with the moral limits of scientific inquiry (Lifton, 1986). Other troubling examples include the plutonium injection studies, the Guatemala syphilis experiments, and the Willowbrook hepatitis study, all characterised by deception, lack of consent, and exploitation of vulnerable individuals (Grodin & Annas, 2000; Grodin, Glantz & Annas, 1997). The story of Henrietta Lacks, whose cells were taken without consent and went on to revolutionise biomedical research, further illustrates the ethical tensions between scientific progress and respect for persons. Her case sparked critical conversations about consent, recognition, and justice that continue even today (Skloot, 2010).

Learning from failure: the rise of ethical frameworks

These historical injustices did not go unanswered. They became the catalyst for the development of formal ethical guidelines designed to protect human participants in research.

The Nuremberg Code (1947) established voluntary informed consent as a non-negotiable requirement. The Declaration of Helsinki, first adopted in 1964, expanded ethical obligations to include participant welfare, independent ethical review, and scientific integrity (World Medical Association, 2013).

The Belmont Report (1979) further shaped modern research ethics by articulating the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, and by institutionalising ethical oversight. Subsequent developments such as Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guidelines and the CIOMS guidelines harmonised ethical standards globally, particularly in clinical trials and research conducted in low- and middle-income countries (Eisenberg, 2015; CIOMS, 1993).

Ethics Review Committees: safeguarding trust

Today, Ethics Review Committees (ERCs), also known as Institutional Review Boards, play a critical role in protecting research participants and maintaining public trust in science. These committees review research protocols to ensure ethical soundness, assess risk–benefit ratios, scrutinise informed consent processes, and consider cultural and social contexts (Lindsey, 2011).

Beyond regulatory compliance, ERCs act as moral guardians, reminding researchers that scientific excellence must never come at the cost of human dignity.

Ethical dilemmas in everyday practice

Ethics is not confined to research or historical case studies—it is deeply embedded in everyday clinical practice. Ethical dilemmas arise when principles conflict: respecting a patient's wishes while preventing harm, balancing individual rights against public health priorities, or making difficult decisions about limited resources.

Such dilemmas rarely offer clear answers and often generate moral distress among healthcare professionals. Navigating them requires ethical reasoning, dialogue with colleagues and ethics committees, engagement with patients and families, and ongoing reflection on personal values and biases (Jonsen, Siegler & Winslade, 2010).

Integrity in research and science

Alongside ethical decision-making, the integrity of scientific research remains a pressing concern. Scientific misconduct—including fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and unethical authorship—undermines the credibility of research and erodes public confidence in science (Resnik, 2011).

Addressing misconduct requires strong institutional cultures that promote transparency, mentorship, accountability, and ethical leadership. Ethical conduct must be recognised not as an administrative burden, but as an essential component of good science.

Looking forward

As medicine enters an era shaped by artificial intelligence, genomics, big data, and global health challenges, new ethical questions will inevitably arise. The future of medicine depends not only on technological innovation, but on our collective commitment to ethical principles that protect human dignity and promote justice.

Ethics ensures that medicine remains a profession of trust, compassion, and moral responsibility. It anchors science to humanity—and reminds us that progress, without ethics, is never truly progress.

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Plant Exudates in the Ayurvedic Medicinal System: Sources, Classification, and Therapeutic Applications

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Introduction

Medicinal plants form the backbone of the Ayurvedic system of medicine, which has been practiced in the Indian subcontinent for more than five millennia. Ayurveda emphasizes a holistic approach to health, integrating preventive, promotive, and curative aspects of healthcare with natural resources, dietary regulation, and lifestyle management. Among the diverse plant-derived materials described in classical Ayurvedic texts, plant exudates represent a distinct and therapeutically significant category due to their concentrated bioactive nature and broad spectrum of pharmacological activities.

Plant exudates are substances secreted or released from specialized plant tissues either naturally or as a response to mechanical injury, environmental stress, or pathogenic attack. These substances serve protective functions for plants, such as sealing wounds and deterring microbial invasion. In Ayurveda, such exudates are highly valued because they are believed to represent the plant's most potent healing principles. Classical Ayurvedic literature collectively refers to these substances under terms such as *Niryāsa* (resins), *Kṣhīra* (latex), *Gondha* (gums), and *Sneha-yukta Niryāsa* (oleoresins).

The earliest documentation of medicinal plant exudates is found in foundational Ayurvedic treatises including the *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*. These texts describe numerous exudates along with their *Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (qualities), *Virya* (potency), *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect), and *Prabhava* (specific action). Such detailed characterization reflects the advanced understanding of pharmacodynamics in ancient Ayurveda and highlights the importance of exudates in disease-specific formulations. Well-known examples include *Guggulu* (*Commiphora mukul*), extensively prescribed for inflammatory disorders and metabolic diseases, and *Hingu* (commonly known as Asafoetida) (*Ferula asafoetida*), used in disorders arising from *Vata* imbalance, particularly those involving the gastrointestinal tract.

From a therapeutic perspective, plant exudates are integral to a wide range of Ayurvedic formulations used in the management of musculoskeletal disorders, gastrointestinal ailments, skin diseases, respiratory conditions, and chronic inflammatory states. Exudates are used in both internal administration and external applications, including *lepa* (pastes), *taila* (medicated oils), and *ghrita* (medicated ghee). The synergistic combination of exudates with other herbal and mineral components is a distinctive feature of Ayurvedic pharmaceutics, aimed at enhancing efficacy while minimizing toxicity.

In recent decades, there has been renewed global interest in traditional medicine systems, driven by concerns regarding adverse effects of synthetic drugs and the growing demand for natural therapeutics. Modern studies have corroborated several traditional claims, demonstrating anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antioxidant, hypolipidemic, and immunomodulatory activities of various gums, resins, and latexes. Such scientific validation underscores the relevance of Ayurvedic knowledge in contemporary drug discovery and integrative medicine.

Despite their therapeutic importance, exudate-yielding plants face significant challenges due to overharvesting, habitat degradation, and unsustainable tapping practices. Inappropriate extraction methods not only reduce yield but also threaten plant survival, leading to ecological imbalance and loss of valuable medicinal resources. Therefore, systematic documentation, sustainable harvesting protocols, and quality standardization are essential to ensure the continued availability and safe use of these substances in Ayurveda.

In this context, the present article aims to provide a review of plant exudates used in the Ayurvedic medicinal system, focusing on their sources, traditional classification, therapeutic applications, and modern pharmacological relevance. By bridging classical Ayurvedic concepts with contemporary scientific perspectives, this review seeks to highlight the enduring significance of plant exudates in both traditional and modern healthcare frameworks.

Concept of Plant Exudates in Ayurveda

Ayurvedic literature describes plant exudates as potent therapeutic agents due to their *Rasa* (taste), *Guna* (qualities), *Virya* (potency), and *Vipaka* (post-digestive effect). These parameters determine their action on the body and their suitability for specific disease conditions.

Exudates are often incorporated into:

- **Churna** (powders)
- **Vati/Gutika** (tablets)
- **Taila and Ghrita** (medicated oils and ghee)
- **Lepa** (external pastes)

Classification of Plant Exudates

Plant exudates used in Ayurveda can be broadly classified as follows:

1 Gums

Gums are amorphous, water-soluble exudates composed mainly of polysaccharides.

Examples: *Gond* (*Acacia nilotica*, *Acacia senegal*), *Gond Katira* (*Sterculia urens*)

Ayurvedic uses: Strength-promoting (*Balya*), Treatment of diarrhea and dysentery, Cooling agent in *Pitta* disorders

2 Resins

Resins are water-insoluble exudates containing complex mixtures of terpenoids.

Examples: *Sarala Niryasa* (*Pinus roxburghii*)

Ayurvedic uses: Anti-inflammatory, Management of arthritis (*Sandhivata*), Obesity and lipid disorders (*Medoroga*)

3 Oleoresins

Oleoresins are mixtures of resin and volatile oil.

Examples: *Turpentine oil* from *Pinus* species

Ayurvedic uses: Respiratory disorders, External application in pain and swelling

4 Olio-Gum-Resins

Oleo-gum-resins are natural plant exudates composed of a mixture of resin, gum, and volatile oils. They are produced mainly by trees and shrubs in response to injury, and their therapeutic use is well-documented in Ayurvedic medicine. These exudates combine the pharmacological properties of gums, resins, and essential oils, making them valuable in a wide range of medicinal formulations.

Oleo-gum-resins are complex mixtures that typically contain:

- Resin fraction (10–50%) – responsible for anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and wound-healing activities.
- Gum fraction (20–40%) – largely polysaccharides; contributes to demulcent, laxative, and soothing properties.
- Volatile oil fraction (1–10%) – provides aromatic, carminative, and antimicrobial effects.

These components act synergistically, enhancing the therapeutic efficacy of the exudate.

Major Oleo-Gum-Resins in Ayurveda

Guggulu (*Commiphora mukul*)

Uses: Anti-inflammatory, lipid-lowering, treatment of arthritis (*Sandhivata*) and obesity (*Medoroga*)

Hingu (Asafoetida) (*Ferula asafoetida*)

Uses: Digestive stimulant, carminative, treatment of flatulence and indigestion

Balsams - *Myroxylon balsamum*

Uses: Wound healing, antiseptic, respiratory therapy

Figure 1: Gugul (Commiphora mukul)

Figure 2: Asafoetida (*Ferula asafoetida*)

5 Latex

Latex is a milky fluid containing enzymes, alkaloids, and other bioactive compounds.

Examples: *Snuhi Kshira* (*Euphorbia neriifolia*), *Arka Kshira* (*Calotropis procera*)

Uses: Purgative (*Virechana*),Treatment of skin diseases and warts (should be used carefully with proper dose after purification processes due to toxicity)

Therapeutic Applications

Plant exudates in Ayurveda exhibit a wide range of therapeutic actions:

- Anti-inflammatory: Guggulu in arthritis and joint disorders
- Antimicrobial: Resins and latex in wound care
- Digestive: Gums and Asafetida for gastrointestinal protection
- Rejuvenate (Rasayana): Certain exudates used in tonic formulations

Their synergistic use with other herbal ingredients enhances efficacy and reduces adverse effects.

Safety and Toxicity Considerations

While most plant exudates are considered safe in traditional doses, some exudates, such as latex from *Calotropis* and *Euphorbia* species, require careful processing due to irritant or toxic properties. Modern toxicological studies guide safe dosages and formulations, bridging traditional knowledge with evidence-based practices.

Integration into Modern Therapeutics

Modern pharmacological research validates the use of Ayurvedic plant exudates in:

- Anti-inflammatory and analgesic herbal products
- Lipid-lowering and metabolic formulations
- Gastrointestinal aids and carminatives
- Topical wound healing and dermatological therapies

Challenges and Conservation Issues

Overexploitation, improper tapping methods and habitat loss threaten many exudate yielding plants. Sustainable harvesting practices, cultivation strategies, and quality control measures are essential to preserve these valuable medicinal resources.

Conclusion

Plant exudates form a vital component of the Ayurvedic materia medica, offering diverse therapeutic benefits supported by both traditional knowledge and modern scientific research. Their holistic application rooted in Ayurvedic principles, highlights the importance of conserving medicinal plants and promoting evidence-based integration of traditional remedies into contemporary healthcare systems.

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Undergraduate Research Award 2025 – SLAAS Section A

The Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science (SLAAS), Section A, successfully introduced the Undergraduate Research Award 2025 for the first time to recognize excellence in undergraduate research in Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science, and Allied Health Sciences.

A total of 81 research submissions were received from projects completed between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2025 as part of bachelor's degree requirements. A step-wise evaluation process was undertaken, with the final selection completed on 22 October 2025.

Following a rigorous review, three outstanding research projects were selected and recognized with certificates and prizes, which were awarded at the inauguration ceremony of the SLAAS Annual Scientific Sessions 2025 held on 7th December 2025, highlighting SLAAS Section A's commitment to nurturing future researchers and advancing health sciences in Sri Lanka.

SLAAS Annual Scientific Sessions 2025 – Section A Highlights

The SLAAS Annual Scientific Sessions 2025 were conducted with a comprehensive scientific program, within which Section A (Medical, Dental, Veterinary and Allied Health Sciences) actively contributed to the main sessions.

The Theme Seminar was held on 8 December 2025 as part of the overall SLAAS program. Section A research presentations were conducted on 9 and 10 December 2025, from 8.00 am to 9.00 am, during the main scientific sessions. This year, 10 research submissions were selected for oral presentation, highlighting the academic quality and breadth of research in the section.

The Section A Presidential Address was delivered during the main SLAAS sessions on 10 December 2025 from 2.15 pm to 3.15 pm by Dr. Jeevani Dahanayake, titled *"Present Status and Challenges of Herbal Drug Development and Clinical Trials: National and Global Perspective."* The address provided important national and global perspectives relevant to current and future research in health sciences.

List of activities of SLAAS Section A: May to August 2025

Date	Activity
September 2025	
23rd September 2025	A webinar on Viral Hepatitis for medical professionals was conducted by Dr. Janaki Abeynayake and Dr. Anusha Fernando. **Activity coordinator: Dr. Sinha de Silva and Dr. Nimali Wijegoonawardene**
25th September 2025	With the support of the relevant authorities, a dog sterilization programme was successfully conducted in the Kaduwela area in commemoration of World Rabies Day **Activity coordinator: Dr. Chamari Kannangara**
26th September 2025	An awareness programme on rabies was successfully conducted in the Kaduwela area in commemoration of World Rabies Day, in collaboration with the relevant authorities. **Activity coordinators: Dr. Chamari Kannangara**
October 2025	
01st October 2025	The World Egg Day celebration was held at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Veterinary Association and the Ministry of Agriculture. Dr Chamari Kannangara represented SLAAS at the event and served as a member of the judging panel for the competitions. **Activity coordinators: Dr. Chamari Kannangara**
01st October 2025	An education session on Reproductive Health for adolescents was conducted at Ragala - TB Herath School with the support of STD clinic Nuwara Eliya. **Activity coordinator: Dr. Nalaka Kulathunge**
09th October 2025	STI Awareness Session for Estate Workers at Heutwell Estate, Nuwara Eliya, organized in partnership with the STD Clinic, Nuwara Eliya, and a local NGO **Activity coordinator: Dr. Nalaka Kulathunge**
November 2025	
21st November 2025	An awareness session on common skin diseases was conducted at the Faculty of Indigenous Medicine, University of Colombo, for members of the cleaning service. The session was delivered by Prof. Sujatha Hewageeganage of the Faculty of Indigenous Medicine **Activity coordinators: Dr. J. M. Dahanayake**

Events in September 2025

A webinar on Viral Hepatitis for medical professionals was conducted by Dr. Janaki Abeynayake and Dr. Anusha Fernando. And it was attended by 25 participants

A dog sterilization programme was successfully carried out in the Kaduwela area in commemoration of World Rabies Day, with the support of relevant authorities.

An awareness programme on rabies was successfully conducted in the Kaduwela area in commemoration of World Rabies Day, in collaboration with the relevant authorities

Events in October 2025

An education session on Reproductive Health for adolescents was conducted at Ragala - TB Herath School with the support of STD clinic Nuwara Eliya. Over 100 students attnded

STI Awareness Session for Estate Workers at Houtville Estate, Nuwara Eliya, organized in partnership with the STD Clinic, Nuwara Eliya, and a local NGO. Over 30 participants benefitted.

Events in November 2025

An awareness session on common skin diseases for cleaning staff was conducted at the Faculty of Indigenous Medicine, University of Colombo, for members of the cleaning service. The session was delivered by Prof. Sujatha Hewageeganage and 15 participants were educated.

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